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Introduction

This commemorative program is a particularly memorable occasion for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). If one thinks back to the beginnings of the Institute and the Research Triangle Park, the amount that has been accomplished in this 20-year period is truly incredible. It is even more impressive when you realize that 20 years ago there was no National Institutes of Health (NIH) program in environmental health sciences and this property had no buildings—only some reminiscences of a "burned out" farm. During 1960, I was on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and was asked to teach environmental pathology because of my interest in metal toxicity. It was truly a fledgling science in those days; much was known about toxicology of many pollutants, but it was difficult to discuss the study of environmental pollutants and human health in any systematic way. I also remember discussions about the appropriate way to organize the Institute and which scientific disciplines should be involved.

But over the past 20 years, a systematic approach to the study of health effects of environmental chemicals has evolved, and, as many of you know, the Institute now has four scientific programs: a very basic intramural program, a biometry and risk assessment program, and a testing development and toxicology program, which is the NIEHS component of the National Toxicology Program. The fourth program is our Extramural Program with its university-based research projects, including the health science centers and marine science centers. These programs and the grand laboratory facility certainly provide a good base for the next 20 years.

This brief 3-day scientific conference and anniversary program is intended not only to commemorate where we have been, but to help us see the future. The program should complement the Report of the Third Task Force for Research Planning in Environmental Health Sciences held just 2 years ago. The topics being highlighted, reproductive and developmental biology, neurotoxicology, and cancer, are areas in which there have been both rapid advances in basic biology and potential health effects of chemicals in the environment.

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